

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

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FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6103

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJ: POLITICAL ASPECTS OF MINISTER GILLESPIE'S VISIT TO CUBA

REF: OTTAWA 1280

1. SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH INDUSTRY, TRADE & COMMERCE (ITC) MINISTER GILLESPIE'S VISIT TO CUBA WAS COMMERCIAL, CANADIAN EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OFFICIAL OBSERVED SOME DEVELOPMENTS OF POLITICAL INTEREST, PARTICULARLY FOR US-CUBA RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBASSY POLITICAL OFFICER CALLED ON PIERRE CHARPENTIER, EXTAFF DIRECTOR, LATIN AMERICAN AFFAIRS, WHO ACCOMPANIED ITC MINISTER GILLESPIE ON TRIP TO CUBA, TO SEE IF EXTAFF HAD ANYTHING TO ADD TO REFTEL.

3. CHARPENTIER CONFIRMED GENERAL SUBJECTS REPORTED IN REFTEL AND COMMENTED THAT TRIP WAS BASICALLY A COMMERCIAL ONE WITH LITTLE POLITICAL CONTENT. HE
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CONFIRMED GREAT CUBAN INTEREST IN CANADIAN TRADE AND ASSISTANCE, AND CONCLUDED WITH SEVERAL OBSERVATIONS:

IT WAS APPARENT THAT CERTAIN SEGMENTS OF TRADE WERE CLEARLY RESERVED FOR SOVIET UNION. THESE INCLUDED AIR TRANSPORTATION, BULK PURCHASES (E.G., WHEAT WHICH CUBA OBTAINS MORE CHEAPLY THROUGH COMECON), AND ENERGY SUPPLIES. CHARPENTIER CHARACTERIZED CUBA AS ENERGY SHORT AND AS RELYING ON SOVIET PETROLEUM PRODUCTS FOR ALMOST ALL ITS ENERGY NEEDS. APPARENTLY, CUBA IS BUILDING AT LEAST TWO POWER PLANTS TO BE FUELED WITH OIL, AND ONE NUCLEAR PLANT; IN THE LATTER INSTANCE CANADA MENTIONED ITS CANDU REACTORS BUT CUBA QUICKLY MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE SOVIET UNION WOULD BE THE SOURCE.

4. THE CANADIANS DID FIND THE CUBANS VERY INTERESTED IN DIVERSIFICATION WITHIN THE LIMITS DESCRIBED ABOVE, AND CHARPENTIER THOUGHT THAT AS MUCH AS 35 PERCENT OF THEIR TRADE WOULD GO TO NON-COMMUNIST COUNTRIES. THEY SHOWED GREAT ENTHUSIASM FOR A PROPOSED MULTI-NATIONAL "CARIBBEAN SHIPPING COMPANY" TO BE FORMED WITH VENEZUELA AND MEXICO. CANADIAN FUNDS WOULD GO INTO SUCH THINGS AS A FISH CANNERY AND PORT FACILITIES. CHARPENTIER VOLUNTEERED THAT WHILE THE US WAS NOT PART OF CUBAN PLANS FOR DEVELOPING TRADE, HE DID THINK THAT THERE WERE A NUMBER OF INTERESTING BLANK SPACES IN THEIR FIVE-YEAR PLAN WHICH PERHAPS THE CUBANS THOUGHT MIGHT BE FILLED BY THE U.S., E.G., A STEEL MILL.

5. CHARPENTIER WAS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN A COMMENT MADE BY THEIR CUBAN INTERPRETER, WHO IT TURNED OUT WAS ALSO HEAD OF THE CUBAN RUM INSTITUTE AND SUSPECTED BY THE CANADIANS OF BEING TOP "SECRET SERVICE TYPE", TO EFFECT THAT US TOURISTS WOULD BE WELCOME IN CUBA "IF THEY'RE WILLING TO OBEY OUR WAY OF DOING THINGS." ACCORDING TO CHARPENTIER, THIS A CONSIDERABLE CHANGE FROM PAST CUBAN POSITION.

6. THE DISCUSSION TURNED TO CUBAN INTEREST IN THE US AND CHARPENTIER SAID THAT THE CUBANS TOLD HIM THEY DID NOT EXPECT MUCH TO HAPPEN BEFORE THE NEXT US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. HOWEVER, THEY WERE GENERALLY RELAXED ABOUT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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THE MATTER AND SEEMED TO REGARD CLOSER CUBAN-US RELATIONS AS SIMPLY A MATTER OF TIME. REGARDING US CLAIMS FOR COMPENSATION FOR EXPROPRIATED PROPERTIES, CHARPENTIER THOUGHT THE CUBANS WOULD TAKE THE LINE THAT THE US OWED CUBA FOR THE LOSSES IT SUFFERED AS A RESULT OF THE EMBARGO.

7. APPARENTLY, CASTRO MENTIONED US-CUBAN RELATIONS IN A PRESS CONFERENCE (REFTEL) IN REPLY TO A QUESTION POSED HIM BY A CANADIAN CORRESPONDENT, ALLEGEDLY AT

THE BEHEST OF THE MIAMI HERALD. THIS HAD TO DO WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF CUBAN EXILES RETURNING TO CUBA, AND CASTRO INDICATED TOTAL DISINTEREST SAYING THAT, AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED, THE EXILES WERE NO LONGER CUBANS AND ANY SUCH APPLICATIONS WOULD HAVE TO BE CONSIDERED ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS.

8. FINALLY, IN REPLY TO A QUESTION REGARDING VISITS TO CUBA BY OTHER CANADIAN MINISTERS, CHARPENTIER COMMENTED THAT MINISTER OF HEALTH MARC LALONDE HAD FOLLOWED GILLESPIE TO CUBA TO CONCLUDE A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WHICH INCREASES THE MODEST CUBAN-CANADIAN HEALTH EXCHANGE PROGRAM. THIS CONSISTS OF AN EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE OF ABOUT TEN NURSES; ALSO A CANADIAN MEDICAL TEAM WILL VISIT CUBA TO STUDY CUBA'S MEDICAL PROGRAM. PORTER

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